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HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM 1977

'CRUCIAL WITNESS' DEAD 1998
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—Associated Press

George de Mohrenschildt, shown with his wife in an earlier photo,

Figure in JFK Probe Found Dead, a 'Suicide'

From News Services

PALM BEACH, Fla. — A Russian-born petroleum geologist and language professor, described as "intimately involved" with Lee Harvey Oswald and a "crucial witness" in the congressional investigation of the Kennedy assassination, was found dead yesterday in an apparent suicide.

Palm Beach County Sheriff Richard Wille identified the victim as George de Mohrenschildt, 65, a professor of French at Dallas' Bishop College.

Wille said de Mohrenschildt, a guest at the historic oceanfront mansion in suburban Manalapan, Fla., of Mrs. Charles Tilton III, apparently placed the muzzle of a 20 gauge shotgun to his mouth and pulled the trigger.

The sheriff said de Mohrenschildt had vanished from Dallas shortly after a Dutch newspaper report about three weeks ago claimed he had prior knowledge of the assassination.

De Mohnrenschildt was traced by a House Assassinations Committee investigator to the Florida address, the sheriff said, and he returned to the Tilton home about 2:45 p.m. yesterday to learn that the investigator, believed to be Gaeton J. Fonzi, had been trying to reach him.

THE DRAMATIC development yesterday, together with sudden sup-

port of a continued investigation by Dr. Martin Luther King Sr., may serve to win the committee a new lease on life. Under continuous attack, the assassinations panel will go out of business at midnight tonight unless the full House votes an extension.

Informed late last night of the death, Rep. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., a key member of the committee, said, "He was a crucial witness

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for us, based on the new information he had. He was intimately involved with Oswald."

When the Warren Commission issued its report in 1964, concluding that President Kennedy was killed by Oswald acting alone, it said it had conducted an extensive investigation into de Mohrenschildt and his wife, Jeanne, because they had known the Oswalds through mutual Russian-speaking friends in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The commission con-

cluded that there was no evidence linking them to the tragic event in Dallas.

In his account quoting de Mohrenschildt as saying he had prior knowledge of the Kennedy assassination, Dutch journalist William Oltmans reported, "He (de Mohrenschildt) asked me 'How do you think the media would react if I came out and said I feel responsible for Oswald's behavior?'"

AFTER VANISHING from Dallas, De Mohrenschildt showed up in Oltmans' office in Holland. Then he disappeared again and was traced by government investigators from Brussels to Florida.

Sheriff Wille said only a maid and the Tilton family chauffeur were at home at the time and the shooting went undiscovered until the body was found by de Mohrenschildt's daughter in a second floor drawing room. Both had been guests at the Tilton home for about a week.

The sheriff said the call to the home was believed to have been placed from Miami by House investigator Fonzi.

About an hour later, Wille said, de Mohrenschildt apparently shot himself. "We're 99 percent certain he killed himself," the sheriff said.

Wille and Palm Beach State Atty. David Bludworth questioned witnesses about the shooting, until shortly before midnight.

Among the witnesses quizzed was free lance writer Ed Epstein, who had told the West Palm Beach Post Monday night that he had been interviewing de Mohrenschildt in connection with a book he was doing about Lee Harvey Oswald.

AFTER HIS questioning last night, Epstein said, "I don't mean to be evasive but the police told me not to talk about de Mohrenschildt's death to anybody."

The Tilton home remained sealed off by sheriff's deputies last night.

According to the Warren Commission report, de Mohrenschildt was born in the Ukraine in 1911 and fled Russia in 1921 following the civil disorders that broke out after the Bolshevik revolution.

He became an American citizen in 1949, having earlier received a graduate degree from the University of Texas in petroleum geology and petroleum engineering.

In 1960, the report states, he traveled for eight months through Mexico and Panama over primitive jungle trails, and by happenstance he and his wife were in Guatemala City when the Bay of Pigs invasion was launched. He prepared a lengthy film clip and a complete written log on the trip and a report was made to the U.S. government, the commission reported.

De Mohrenschildt death was third involving witnesses or potential witnesses before congressional panels investigating assassinations.

Underworld figure Sam Giancana was murdered before, and John Roselli was killed after, testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee investigating allegations that the assassination of Kennedy was in retaliation for CIA efforts to assassinate Cuban Premier, Fidel Castro.